



STD/HIV Partner Services

The result of reducing staff or funding of this activity would be reducing the number of patients that receive partner services for syphilis and/or HIV infection. This could result in higher rates of syphilis and HIV. If funding was increased, more patients could receive partner services potentially even patients with gonorrhea and/or chlamydia. In addition, partner services could be provided in a more timely manner.

Objective

To prevent death, disability, and social loss by interrupting and preventing the spread of STDs through the identification of potentially infectious patients and their referral to treatment.

Performance Indicator

Proportion of primary and secondary syphilis cases interviewed within 14, and 30 calendar days from the date of specimen collection.

Narrative

The STD and HIV/AIDS Programs collaborate to provide partner services. Partner services are a broad array of services offered to persons with HIV or syphilis and their sexual or needle-sharing partners. By identifying infected persons, confidentially notifying their partners of their possible exposure, and providing infected persons and their partners a range of medical, prevention, and psychosocial services, partner services can improve the health not only of individuals, but of communities as well.

Partner Services is an important component of the Syphilis Elimination Effort (SEE). SEE is a national initiative that brings together health care providers, policy makers, community leaders and state and local public health agencies, to reduce syphilis rates in the United States. Working together, we have a unique opportunity to control this devastating disease, reduce the transmission of HIV, and protect unborn infants.

Principles of Partner Services

The following principles serve as the foundation for providing partner services:

- **Client centered.** All steps of the partner services process should be tailored to the behaviors, circumstances, and specific needs of each client.
- **Confidential.** Confidentiality should be maintained and is essential to the success of partner services. Confidentiality also applies to data collected as part of the partner services process. When notifying partners of exposure, the identity of the index patient must never be revealed, and no information about partners is conveyed back to the index patient.

Disclosed private information is held in strict confidence, both because of its private nature and as a sign of respect for the person who is volunteering to share the information to help others. Real or perceived breaches can endanger persons being served, who might face stereotyping; social isolation; loss of social or financial support; barriers to accessing housing, employment, and various social and medical services; and physical or emotional abuse. Breaches also can undermine community trust in and access to important public health programs and services.

- **Voluntary and non-coercive.** Participating in partner services is voluntary for both infected persons and their partners; they should not be coerced into participation.
- **Free.** Partner services is free of charge for infected persons and their partners.
- **Evidence based.** Partner services is evidence based
- **Culturally, linguistically, and developmentally appropriate.** Partner services should be provided in a nonjudgmental way and be appropriate for the cultural, linguistic, and developmental characteristics of each client.
- **Accessible and available to all.** Partner services should be accessible and available to all infected persons regardless of where they are tested or receive a diagnosis.

Better Health

Partner services is offered to approximately 1000 persons with syphilis and 1000 persons with HIV infection statewide each year as soon as possible after diagnosis, regardless of the infection. Urgency and promptness are essential elements of effective partner services. These patients are primarily African-American and low income. By identifying and treating people with syphilis early in their infection, the cost of treatment is decreased by preventing congenital and late stages of syphilis.

Partner Services is a collaborative effort of the HIV/AIDS and STD Programs within the Office of Public Health Center for Preventive Health. The intervention is carried out by Disease Intervention Specialists housed in each of the public health regional offices in cooperation with all public and private medical providers in the state who treat sexually transmitted diseases.

Youth Education

- Students perform better when they show up for class, healthy and ready to learn. STD treatment is needed by a significant portion of Louisiana's youth.

Safe and Thriving Children and Families

- Poverty among Louisiana's citizens has hampered the ability of citizens to receive appropriate treatment for sexually transmitted diseases in a timely manner. Delayed treatment leads to unnecessary spread of disease and complications including infertility. Over 50% of patients seen in STD clinics are less than 25 years old.

Hurricane Protection & Emergency Preparedness

- During an emergency STD staff serve as first responders (individuals involved in an emergency management role) to execute Emergency Support Function 8 tasks.

Partner services programs offer substantial benefits to three principal groups: persons infected with HIV infection or other STDs, their partners, and the community. Partner services can help persons with HIV or syphilis ensure that partners are notified of their possible exposure to the infection, while protecting the confidentiality of the patients. Partners of persons with HIV infection or syphilis are at high risk for infection, as indicated by the high prevalence of infection among notified partners and may not be aware of their risk and have never been tested. Partner services provide a confidential process for these persons to become aware of their risk and access appropriate diagnostic, treatment, and prevention services. Partner services can benefit the community by helping reduce transmission rates, reducing effects of disease, and facilitating earlier identification and treatment of previously undiagnosed syphilis and HIV infection among its members. Finally, partner services can improve disease surveillance and identify sex and drug-injection networks at high risk for infection that can then be targeted for screening and prevention services (38).

Legal Authority: Partner services are supported by RS 40:1062 – Infection of other prohibited, RS 40:1063 – Examination of persons suspected of being infected, and Louisiana Administrative Code Title 51 – Public Health – Sanitary Code Part II The Control of Diseases Chapter 1 paragraph 115 Investigations.

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